

## **A Blanket for One & the Death of Naivety**

A different type of a Canadian Army basic training story from a recruit who had a dream to be a career soldier.

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**Dedicated to those who have buried demons,  
may you find your voice to heal yourself.**

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Birds chirping, sun streaming in the window already heating up my bedroom for a typical summer's day. But this was no ordinary summer day, it was July 28, 1979, my seventeenth birthday and the day that I have been impatiently waiting for for the last two years, ever since I decided on the life path for me.

Was it what every teenager dreams of, getting my drivers licence, nah did that last year. Sneaking into a bar to watch the ladies dance and have a few beers, nah done that regularly, actually don't have to sneak in anymore. Guess I can't actually answer that, ya see I wasn't a normal seventeen year old, already had plenty of life experiences, good ones and bad ones.

What time was it anyway, don't think the alarm went off. After a good stretch the clock says

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5:38 am, whoa still a couple of hours to wait, might as well get up, shower, have a good breakfast and get ready to go. Soon getting up at five-thirty in the morning will be sleeping in.

Boogie Wonderland starts blaring from the clock radio on the night stand, okay six am, lets get going, good upbeat song to wake up to.

By the time I got downstairs to the kitchen to get some breakfast Dad was already gone to work and Mom was just getting ready to leave.

“Morning Mom, how are you today?”

“Okay, so today’s the day, you’re still going to do it?”

“Oh ya, looking forward to it.”

“Well whatever, make sure you don’t forget to take the garbage out and get the grass cut this weekend, your Dad wants you home for dinner, don’t forget.”, and off to work she went. It’s been a while since I forgot take the garbage out and she still acts like it happens all the time and no Happy Birthday to me eh. Not like it’s the first time she forgot, but that’s okay, it’s just the way Mom is.

Bacon, eggs, toast and coffee, breakfast is ready, mmmmm happy tummy.

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Grabbed my boots, jacket and keys and out to the garage to get my baby, a black and chrome 400 XS Yamaha motorcycle, paid for by my own sweat. She was my baby and gave me so much fun and sense of freedom this past year. I was going to miss her, can't take her with me but I know my Dad will take good care of her and get as much enjoyment as I did. There on the seat of my bike were the signed consent papers that I needed and a card from Dad, Happy Birthday Son, Have a Great Day, Love Dad. Dad was awesome at unconditional support.

I hop on the bike, put my hair into a pony tail, secure my helmet, light a smoke and head out into the day. Off the local Army recruiting office and time to enlist, it's going to be a great day.

So what made me want to join the Army, why was I so excited about this. Like they say - "It's not just a job, it's an adventure", actually I felt that the Army would allow me the opportunity to grow in many areas and help me become an educated and well rounded man.

This decision isn't the fantasy of some punk seventeen year old, even though I was one at times, but a fairly reasonable and well thought-out plan.

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Back in junior high school (grades seven & eight) I really didn't have a life plan, just going with the flow. My school was a progressive type of school, students could progress at their own speed. Which for me meant that in grade eight I was doing grades twelve & thirteen math and sciences, ya I was considered kinda smart. For extra credit the two math teachers would post ciphers and advanced math problems for the students to figure out. I enjoyed this immensely and even made ciphers and problems for the math teachers to figure out, that's why I was taught the higher grades of math and sciences.

Then I graduated to high school, grade nine here I come. The high school that I went to wasn't progressive in their teachings so I had to redo the grade nine math and sciences which were extremely boring for me. I did try to do it their way for the first half of the year, but since the teachers kept holding me back my mind started to wander and think of other paths for my life that didn't require suffering through mundane high school.

After some research I decided on joining the military. I could get all kinds of training, travel the world, and retire in twenty-three years, about the same time as my Dad. Then we could go on the cross country bike run that we had talked about.

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Here I am at the local armoury where the Armed Forces Recruiters had set up shop for the week. Time to go in and enlist.

Well I did, listen to the seminar and recruiting spiel, passed the dummy test (Recruiting Officer said that I could go into Officer's Training but I was like no thanks, if I become an Officer it's because I worked my way up from Basic Recruit), and now I am enlisted as a Radio Operator in the Canadian Infantry, woo-hew! November 22nd can't come quick enough because that's when I enter CFB Cornwallis and begin my recruit training. Life is great again.

Now it's almost four months until I leave, I am already working full-time insulating houses, have a girlfriend, friends, party friends, all kinds of friends, so I will work hard, party hard spend a few months with my baseball and hockey teams (I am the youngest trainer for both teams as they are old-timer leagues which mean that you need to be thirty-five or over to play). The guys on the teams are great with me, they treat me as though I am one of them, not some punk kid. I've been with them for a couple of years now which had help me to mature quicker than my school mates, which was cool because I really had nothing in common with kids my age.

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Generally I will live the next few months as a civilian until it comes time for me to help protect our Country.

November 21<sup>st</sup>, the big day has finally come. I'm at the train station, saying good-bye to my parents and fiancé. Time to board the train to my new life as a proud defender of our great country.

I got a seat at the back of the passenger compartment right next to the bar car, just in case I would be able to get a beer and a shot for the trip.

Turns out the guy sitting next to was going to CFB Cornwallis. He decided to join up when the Judge gave him a choice to either go to jail for three years or join the military for three years. So the Army it is for him.

We struck it off right away, I was good at making friends, and since he was a few years older than me he went and got us a round of drinks, my treat, after all we are now brothers in arms.

We spent the time travelling to CFB Cornwallis talking and drinking, making friends and interacting with the other passengers, turns out my brother in arms told the bartender that we were going to join the army and a group of people heard him and kept us both supplied with beer and whisky for the entire trip. Needless to say, even though I kept up with the drink-fest, I don't remember arriving at our new home.

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November 22<sup>nd</sup>, six am, and we were abruptly awakened but a roaring voice telling us the get out of our bunks and that this is the last time that we would be allowed to sleep this late.

My travel companion and I ended up in a squad of thirty other military hopefuls and our first day is spent getting our gear, vaccines, training manuals etcetera and being told how to walk, how to act, not to talk and basically everything that we would need to know to become a proud member of the Canadian Armed Forces.

The next eight weeks were spent learning all that we needed to learn for the trades that we are going into. Parade drills, small and medium weapons, physical fitness, hygiene, self defence, codes, history, geography, and strengthening our brothers in arms mentality.

During our off time (which wasn't very much), we gambled, smoked, talked about all kinds of things, and strengthening our bond with each other. I was able to get along with most of the guys, but there was a small few who seemed to resent me. Whether it was because I was naturally good at all aspects of our training, and seemed to be pretty smart I never knew, but they seemed to be either jealous or intimidated or both. Either way, they barely contained it and just left me alone, which was fine by me. Even if they got physical, no problem, I've had plenty of scraps and could take a

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punch, I had already proved that in our self defence classes.

Now it's the end of week eight, only three more to go and I graduate and then on my way to achieve my red beret and a home in an infantry unit. Passed all the courses so far with great marks and received my first hat badge, the tri-service badge, affectionately known as the cornflake.

Time to head home for the Christmas break.

It was a great Christmas break, visiting with family, partying with my friends, hitting a couple of bars with my Dad that he used to hang out with and meeting his old friends. Definitely a fantastic time was had by all.

Back on base, three weeks left so time to finish up basic training.

It was a quiet first night back, the whole squad was back in the barracks, groups of guys sitting around comparing their time away. You know, the usual chatter, drinking bouts, sexual conquests, bar fights, etcetera.

As I was squaring away my kit and bunk I heard, "Hey Wilkes come over here for a moment"

"Just a moment guys", finished folding my shirts, then I went over to their bunks to see what they wanted.



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“Hey what’s up?”

Then the unthinkable happened, my brothers in arms threw a fire blanket (thick wool) over my head and body and wrapped it so tight around me so I couldn’t move my arms (which were trapped at my sides) and being over my head I couldn’t see what was happening, they even held the blanket tighter so I also couldn’t move, turn or run away (I wouldn’t run away anyway), then the beating started and all hell opened up.

I don’t remember how long the beating lasted, but what I do know is that as the punches and kicks kept landing all over my body I kept thinking that they were cowards, bullies, nothing but rancid, maggot infested pieces of meat, and unless they knocked me out, I was staying on my feet. Frack them, I’m not going down, I can take anything that these cowards threw at me.

“He’s not going down!” one of the cowards yelled, “Now what do we do?”

Next thing I knew they were dragging and pushing me I don’t know where as I was still wrapped up.

Pushing and shoving me through the barracks, still couldn’t get loose, the blanket was wrapped too tight. Stay on my feet, was all that I could think. Stay on my feet so they couldn’t stomp on me.

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Just when I thought that it couldn't get any worse, I was thrown against what I thought was a wall and held there. Then it got worse, more then I could have imagined. My head was pulled back and hot water started soaking through the blanket, they were holding me in a shower stall! I couldn't breathe, hot water flowing through the blanket into my nose and mouth. I couldn't talk but my mind was racing, fuck I can't breathe. Can't breathe, heart pounding so hard I think that it's going to explode, fuck I can't breathe, blinding headache, fuck I can't breathe, face feels like it's being scalded, I CAN'T FUCKING BREATHE YOU GOD DAMN COWARDS!

Don't know if I passed out or not but then next thing I knew was that no one was holding me, I was still standing and that I could move my head out of the way. I tore the blanket off of me, those cowards broke my glasses. Rage erupted like a volcano and I snapped. Every member of my squad, those who attacked me and the rest who did nothing to help me, who I had sworn allegiance to as my brothers in arms, who I would have unquestionably taken a bullet for were now all nothing but rancid, maggot infested pieces of meat only worthy as targets of my vengeful wrath. My dream of a career in the military, retiring at the same time as my Dad and our cross country motorcycle run was destroyed! I wanted to kill them all.

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I don't remember much in the next few weeks that followed, but what I do know is that I was moved out of my barracks into base holding, and worked in different places around the base to finish my term of service and receive a honourable discharge.

How many there was that beat on me, what happened to them and the rest of my squad, even how how I travelled from CFB Cornwallis , Nova Scotia, to Niagara Falls Ontario I don't remember. Could have been the concussion or the brain damage or my mind just deleted those memories.

What I can say is how that event dramatically changed my personality and affected the course of my life.

Where once I was easy going, trusting and highly energetic with lots of friends, I was now remorse, sullen, distanced myself from friends and family, broke it off my fiance, and no longer trusted any human. I couldn't even have anyone in a Canadian military uniform standing behind me, not even a mannequin in a uniform. I became the hard core loner who travelled in the roughest of crowds and most dangerous of situations. Sex, drugs, rock and roll and violence was my path. Since I wasn't the type to commit suicide I figured that I would make it easy for Death to find me.

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This happened when I was seventeen, and even though I never forgot about this life altering event, the emotional and psychological energies and memories were safely compartmentalized in a deep dark corner of my mind, but they did have an overwhelming control over my life path.

The next forty years was saturated with failed jobs, failed intimate relationships, failed friendships (except for a small few), and a reoccurring five year cycle of my life completely collapsing and having to move and start over.

Then on or about my fifty-fourth birthday that compartment collapsed and all those memories and feelings came flooding out. A tsunami of rage, remorse, humiliation, and fear. I again lost my job, relationship, pension, savings, home and most of my belongings, and moved to my home town to start over.

I tried to deal with this in my own way, but after two years of an unsuccessful course of action I approached Veterans Affairs Canada, stated my case about what happened and ended up with a compensation and benefits which allowed my to have psychotherapy that they paid for. It was because of this that I met a good man who was a compassionate psychotherapist, with who after two years of intense therapy, I was able to finally find peace in my life and find a way to be able to trust

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people. Plus he helped me realized that all things considered, I have had a very well experienced life, five lifetimes worth in one.

So to those comrade cowards who were my squad, you didn't knock me down and I survived. Only wish that I could meet you all again now.

And to those who are planning to join the military plus those who are in and also those who are retired, blanket parties may seem like a joke but to those on the receiving end it can have extreme consequences.

**Course 7947-4 Squad,  
Thanks For The Memories**

**The End**